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no. 5
Biological
& Medical
Serials

Ophthalmic Literature

VOL 1 MAY, 1911 NO. 5

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Published monthly. Price Five Dollars per year in advance.

Address all communications to

530 Metropolitan Building Denver, Colorado, U. S. A.

LIMITS TO THE CLASSIFICATION OF LITERATURE.

The student who seeks in the literature of science for all that bears upon the special subject of his study soon finds that his search must be long and minute, if he is to discover all the material that lies there ready to serve his purpose. The editor who attempts to bring order out of chaos, by some arrangement and classification of such literature that will render it more accessible and useful, is constantly confronted with difficulties which, in part, must be accepted as setting limits to the value and usefulness of any classification. Facts are interrelated so broadly and so intimately, that to classify them rigidly according to one set of relations is certain to do violence to other relations, that may for certain purposes be of equal or greater importance.

Take trachoma for example. Trachoma is a disease of the conjunctiva. Everybody thinks of it as such, except, perhaps, a few who discuss it as a general condition manifesting itself chiefly through the conjunctival lesions. Now there must be something in the general physical character of the patient that determines whether an attack of the disease shall end in recovery in a few months, as some cases do without treatment; or in many years of disability or complete blindness. But aside from these general relations trachoma invades other parts of the eye beside the conjunctiva. The corneal lesions are often the most disturbing and urgent. Unquestionably they are a part of the trachoma. They belong with the other phenomena of the disease. But can we omit them or ignore them in preparing a catalogue of diseases of the cornea? Less frequent, but important, are the trachomatous invasions of the lacrimal sac and the lacrimal gland. In the smaller field of lacrimal disease these play relatively as large a part as pannus does in diseases of the cornea. To confine mention of trachoma to the section on diseases of the

conjunctiva is to leave the sections on diseases of the cornea and diseases of the lacrimal apparatus incomplete. To remove the discussion of special lesions of trachoma to other heads destroys any complete massing under one head of all that relates to trachoma. What is true of trachoma is true of glaucoma, of intraocular hemorrhage, of diplobacillus infections, and many other important ocular diseases; and is even more true with reference to the ocular lesions of such general processes as tuberculosis or syphilis.

But in another direction difficulties of classification arise. Trachoma gives rise to problems of immense importance in school hygiene, and in the control of immigration. Its share in causing disability must be considered in connection with accidents of labor. It figures largely in statistics of blindness. It raises questions of racial immunity, and the influence of climate. Aside from the lesions of parts of the eye other than the conjunctiva it must be considered in aspects quite removed from pathology, diagnosis, prognosis and treatment; as under hygiene, economics, statistics, etc. And we have not exhausted our illustration, for the finding of the trachoma bodies in various conjunctival conditions raises questions of classification within the literature devoted to trachoma.

No arrangement or classification of the literature that ignores these many phases of a subject like trachoma would be satisfactory or useful. Something can be done by multiple allusions and cross references. Yet these are a confession of the impossibility of complete arrangement and classification; and they must be indulged in very sparingly. They may be made to increase enormously any index or biographical list, and to that extent to lessen its usefulness. A good index is the most serviceable part of any book of reference. But an index as large as the book itself, and it could easily be made so, would be the most useless collection of words imaginable.

It comes then to this: the rigidity of any system of classification of literature, the minuteness to which it can be carried, the extent to which it can be relied on are strictly limited. When all has been done that can be done to render available and easily accessible the wealth of material already worked up in scientific literature, the student must still bring to his task the trained, informed mind, if he is to gather new values in these ever broadening fields of professional opportunity and achievement.

IMPORTANT PAPERS.

No attempt is made to notice here all the papers that should have a permanent place in the literature of ophthalmology; nor all that it would be important for the student to read in a careful investigation of the particular subjects of which they treat. It is only attempted to call attention to a few papers each month, with which every one engaged in the practice of ophthalmology should make himself familiar at the earliest opportunity, even though the subject of the paper be not at the time engaging his attention. It is only papers that stand out in this way from the general level of ophthalmic writings that we intend to mention under this head.

In the lists for the present month the paper of Hesse, discussing the question of whether the operative treatment of high myopia has justified itself, should be considered by everyone who undertakes to treat myopia. Ruata has applied the tonometer of Schiötz, and the sphigmomanometer of Riva Rocci to an elaborate study of the relations between intraocular tension and blood pressure. Staehli goes minutely into the anatomy of hemorrhagic glaucoma. Correspondence between Majors Smith and Kilkelly, with regard to the Bombay cases as illustrating the results of Smith's cataract operation, makes interesting reading. Duane has begun the formulation of the indications for operations in heterophoria and squint. Birch-Hirschfeld and Inouye report their study of the action of "indarsol" on the optic nerve. Fuchs calls attention to a condition which he has recognized as resulting from contusion of the eye, internal rupture of the sclera. The papers of Finger and Géronne and Gutmann throw the latest light upon the nerve disturbances following the use of salvarsan. Contino has made a valuable contribution to the subject of papilloma of the limbus and cornea.

Index of Ophthalmology.

METHODS OF DIAGNOSIS.

Fitz, G. W. Pupillometer. Arch. of Ophth. xl, p. 285.

Goldberg, H. A Transilluminator. Wills Hosp. Ophth. Soc., April 3.

Hertzell, C. Ophthalmo-diaphanoscope. Ophthalmoscope, ix, p. 358.

Langenhan. Diaphanoscopy with Strong Light. Pigment Defects in Iris. Graefe's Arch. f. Ophth. lxxix, p. 137.

Marple, W. B. The Electric Ophthalmoscope. Ophth. Rec. xx, p. 225.

Terson, A. Simulation and Visual Fraud in Accidents of Labor. Jour. Med. de Bruxelles, xvi, April 27.

Wolff. Apparatus for Testing Perception of Depth. Zeitschr. f. Augenh. xxv, p. 405.

THERAPEUTICS.

Barrett, J. W. and Orr, W. F. Action of Eserin on Eye. Australian Med. Jour., March.

Cords, R. Adrenalin Mydriasis. Zeitschr. f. Augenh. xxv, p. 350.

Crigler, L. W. Rupia of Upper Lid Treated with Cacodylate of Soda. Arch. of Ophth. xl, p. 281.

Fehr. Discoloration of Inflamed Eyes from the Internal Use of Uranin. Mediz. Klin., April 2.

Knapp, A. Angioma of Eyelid Treated with Carbonic Acid Snow. Arch. of Ophth. xl, p. 297.

Marmoiton, C. Ephedrin. La Clin. Opht. xvii, p. 237.

Ryerson, G. S. Radium in Eye Diseases. Canada Lancet, xliv, p. 510.

OPERATIONS.

Fromaget, C. Dressing of Iodoform for Tuberculous Dacryocystitis after Operation. L'Opht. Prov. March. Ophthalmoscope, ix, p. 380.

Odinzow. Epithelial Penetration and Formation of Cysts within the Eye and in the Sclerotic. Viestnik. Ophth. xxvii, p. 996.

REFRACTION.

Hesse, R. Is Operative Treatment of High Myobia Justifiable? Zeitschr. f. Augenh. xxv, p. 417.

Kadinsky. Temporary Change of Refraction in Diabetes. Klin. Monatsbl. f. Augenh. April, p. 524.

Lambert, W. E. Lens Extraction in High Myopia. Arch. of Ophth. xl, p. 280.

Morrell, A. Prescription of Glasses. Brit. Med. Jour. May 13, p. 1110.

Siebenlist, W. Statistical Study of Myopia. Zeitschr. f. Augenh. xxv, p. 443.

Thomson, E. Management of Presbyopia in Certain Classes of Workmen. Ophthalmoscope, ix, p. 324.

Wagenmann, A. Correction of Aphakia from Infancy with Prism Spy-glass. Graefe's Arch. f. Ophth. lxxix, p. 160.

Wever, J. S. Extreme Myopia. Ophth. Rec. xx, p. 222.

Wölfflin, E. Causes of Monocular Diplopia. (Bibl.) Arch. f. Augenh. lxviii, p. 348.

OCULAR MOVEMENTS.

Alter, F.W. Bilateral Ophthalmoplegia Externa with Bulbar Symptoms. Ohio State Med. Jour. vii, p. 237.

Blanco, T. Tenotomy or Advancement for Strabismus. Arch. de Oftal. Hisp.-Amer. xi, p. 218.

Duane, A. Indications for Operation in Heterophoria and Squint. (Continued.) Arch. of Ophth. xl, p. 246.

Ellett, E. C. Advancement of an Ocular Muscle. Ophth. Rec. xx, p. 279.

Hansell, H. F. Toxic Paralysis of Accommodation. Ophth. Rec. xx, p. 165.

Jewell, W. H. New Advancement Forceps for Squint. Lancet, May 13, p. 1288.

Krusius. Bloodless Treatment of Squint. Berl. Ophth. Gesell. Feb. 23. Ophth. Rev. xxx, p. 157.

Lagrange. Amblyopia of Strabismus. Arch. d'Opht. xxxi, p. 193.

Marburg. Subcortical Ocular Palsies. Zeitschr. f. Augenh. xxv, p. 490.

Muegge, F. Anomalous Projection in Convergent Strabismus. Graefe's Arch. f. Ophth. lxxix, p. 1.

Purtscher, A. Oculo-motor Paralysis in Infant. Wiener Klin. Woch. xxiv, No. 14.

Ritchie, F. G. Two New Operations for Advancement of an Extrinsic Ocular Muscle. Jour. Ophth. Otol. and Laryngol. xvii, p. 155.

Schenck, H. D. Senega in Paralysis of Superior Rectus. Ibid. p. 170.

Stilwill, H. R. Motor Oculi Paralysis. Tr. Colorado Ophth. Soc. Feb. 18.

Stirling, A. W. Nystagmus on Closing Eye. Ophthalmoscope, ix, p. 327.

Vigouroux and Fourmand. Paralysis of Third Pair in General Paralysis. Recueil d' Opht. xxxiii, p. 91.

CONJUNCTIVA.

Aliens and Trachoma. Lancet, May 13, p. 1298.

Beard, C. H. Unilateral Vernal Conjunctivitis. Chicago Ophth. Soc., Feb. 16.

Bourgeois. Ocular Pemphigus. L'Opht. Prov., Jan.

Brodin. Hemorrhage of Conjunctiva of Syphilitic Origin. Recueil d'Opht. xxxiii, p. 58.

Brown, S. H. Conjunctivitis (Ophthalmia) Neonatorum. St. Louis Med. Rev. lx, p. 108.

Chance, B. "Cured" Trachoma. Wills Hosp. Ophth. Soc., April 3.

Fehr. Pemphigus of Conjunctiva in Severe Syphilis. Berl. Ophth. Gesell. Feb. 23. Ophth. Rev. xxx, p. 156.

Frescoln, L. D. Pneumococcic Conjunctivitis. Sec. on Ophth. Coll. Phys. Phila., Feb. 16.

Friedenwald, H. Classification of Diphtheritic Conjunctivitis. Jour. Amer. Med. Assn., May 20, p. 1454.

Hegner, C. A. Histology of Experimental Inclusion Conjunctivitis. Klin. Monatsbl. f. Augenh., April, p. 440.

Heymann, B. Microscopic Experimental Studies on the Distribution of the Halberstaedter-Prowazek Bodies. (Bibl.) Ibid, p. 417.

Hicks, J. R. Treatment of Phyctenular Conjunctivitis. Ophth. Rec. xx, p. 231.

Lafon, C. Tuberculoma of Palpebral Conjunctiva. (Bibl.) Ann. d'Oculist. cxlv, p. 241.

McKee, H. Trachoma Bodies from Non-trachomatous Eyes. Ophth. Rec. xx, p. 236.

Meyerhof, M. Epidemic Gonorrheal Ophthalmia and Its Relation to Trachoma. Klin. Jahrb. xxiv.

Nance, W. O. Antepartum Purulent Ophthalmia. Chicago Ophth. Soc., Feb. 16.

Parinaud's Conjunctivitis. Ibid., March 20.

Pagenstecher, H. E. and Wissmann, R. Metastatic Panophthalmitis from Gram-negative cocci, other than Meningococci. (Bibl.) Klin. Monatsbl. f. Augenh. April, p. 468.

Poulard and Canque. Subconjunctival Ecchymosis from Compression of Thorax. Soc. d'Opht. de Paris, Feb.

Pratt, J. A. Etiology of Trachoma. Ophth. Rec. xx, p. 254.

Sattler, C. H. Etiology of Trachoma. Mediz. Klin. vii, No. 15.

Sisson, E. O. Inflammation of Conjunctiva and Cornea of Tubercular Origin. Denver Med. Times, xxx, p. 423.

Starodubzewa. Parinaud's Conjunctivitis. Klin. Monatsbl. f. Augenh., April, p. 524.

Steiner, L. New Operation for Pseudo-pterygium. Ibid, p. 506.

Stuelp. Conjunctival Tuberculosis or Parinaud's Conjunctivitis. Arch. f. Augenh. lxviii, p. 437.

Terson, A. Structure, Prognosis and Operation for Pterygium. Soc. d'Opht. de Paris, Feb.

Topolanski. Pseudo-trachoma. Zeitschr. f. Augenh. xxv, p. 493.

Trachoma Among Immigrants. New York Med. Jour. xciii, p. 835.

Verderame, P. Infection of Eye by Bacillus Pyocyaneus. Centralbl. f. Bakt., April 19, p. 302.

Weidler, W. B. Pemphigus of Conjunctiva. Arch. of Ophth. xl, p. 283.

Kanstoroom, D. S. Trachoma a Sequel of Malaria. Jour. Ophth. Otol., and Laryngol. xvii, p. 173.

Zentmayer, W. and Reese, W. T. Trachoma Bodies. Sec. on Ophth. Coll. Phys. Phila., Feb. 16.

Operation for Trachoma. Wills Hosp. Ophth. Soc., March 7.

Abstract. Eloui Pacha. (Page 33). Ophthalmoscope, ix, p. 380. **Knapp, P.** (Page 6.) Ophthalmoscope, ix, p. 380.

CORNEA AND SCLERA.

Bell, G. H. Ocular Manifestations of Peripheral Affections of Fifth Cranial Nerve. Med. Rec., May 13.

Bourgeois, A. Sterilization by Heat of Infected Corneal Ulcers. Ann. d'Oculist. cxlv, p. 273.

Chance, B. Remarkable Dispersion of Pigment in Tattooed Cornea. Ophth. Rev. xxx, p. 129.

Clausen. Hereditary Inflammatory or Degenerative Disease of Cornea. Berl. Ophth. Gesell., Feb. 22. Ophth. Rev. xxx, p. 157.

Fromaget, C. and Mongour. Interstitial Keratitis Treated by Marmorek's Serum. Rec. d'Opht. xxxiii, p. 49.

Hoffmann, E. Experimental Corneal Syphilis. Münch. Med. Woch. March 28, p. 665.

Ichikawa, K. Trachomatous Alteration in Sclerotic Coat. (Bibl.) Graefe's Arch. f. Ophth. lxxix, p. 64.

Krauss. Tuberculous Keratitis. Sec. on Ophth. Coll. Phys. Phila., Feb. 16.

Lubowski and Sachsmuke. Cure of Septic Corneal Ulcers by Zinc Iontophoresis. Mediz. Klin. No. 6.

Magitot. Possibility of Preserving Transparent Cornea Outside the Organism. Soc. d'Opht. de Paris, Feb.

Neschicz. Operative Treatment of Corneal Staphyloma. Klin. Monatsbl. f. Augenh., April, p. 526.

Pagenstecher, H. E. Corneal Infection Through Bacillus Pyocyaneus. (Bibl.) Graefe's Arch. f. Ophth. lxxix, p. 130.

Pfalz. Epithelial Dystrophy of Cornea. Arch. f. Augenh. lxviii, p. 437.

Rolleston, J. D. Inherited Syphilis and Blue Sclerotics. Ophthalmoscope, ix, p. 321.

Schultz, M. H. Bilateral Marginal Thinning and Ectasia of Cornea. Chicago Ophth. Soc., Feb. 16.

Stephenson, S. Conical Cornea. Ophthalmoscope, ix, p. 328.

Strachow. Trauma Causing Parenchymatous Keratitis. Klin. Monatsbl. f. Augenh., April, p. 523.

Yorke. Lesions of Cornea in Animal Experimentally Infected with T. Rhodesiense. Annals of Trop. Med. and Parasitology, March.

Worthington, H. Superficial Keratitis. Chicago Ophth. Soc., March 20.

Zeizew. Colon Bacillus Causing Hypopion Keratitis. Viestnik Ophth. xxviii, No. 1.

ANTERIOR CHAMBER AND PUPIL.

Banner, C. W. Pupil Reaction in Health and Disease. Virginia Med. Semi-Month., May 12, p. 70.

Barnes, F. M. Pupillary Disturbances in Alcoholic Psychoses. New York Med. Jour., May 13, p. 928.

Dufour. Syndrome of Horner with Goitre. Recueil d'Opht. xxxiii, p. 90.

Magitot, A. Argyll-Robertson Symptom and Spasmodic Miosis with Convergence. (Bibl.) Ann. d'Oculist. cxlv, p. 258.

Sachs. Hemianopic Pupil Reaction. Zeitschr. f. Augenh. xxv, p. 493.

Sebileau, P. and Lemaitre, F. Pupil Reaction to Adrenalin in Syndrome of Horner. Soc. d'Opht. de Paris, Feb.

UVEAL TRACT.

Doak, R. S. Iritis. Jour. Tenn. State Med. Assn., April.

Filatow, W. P. Syphiloma of Ciliary Body. Viestnik Ophth. xxviii, No. 1.

Fleischer, B. Iris Tuberculosis Following Cold. Med. Klin. No. 5.

Hack, R. Eversion of Pigment Layer of Iris. (Bibl.) Arch. f. Augenh. lxviii, p. 343.

Posey, W. C. Uveitis Treated with Salvarsan. Wills Hosp. Ophth. Soc., Feb. 6.

Rosenthal. Rare Form of Pupillary Membrane. Klin. Monatsbl. f. Augenh., April, p. 523.

Salzmann. Tubercular Tumor of Choroid. Zeitschr. f. Augenh. xxv, p. 490.

Schieck, F. Experimental Tuberculosis of Iris and Choroid in Rabbits. Deutsche Med. Woch. xxxvii, p. 729.

Spencer, F. R. Atrophic Changes in Fundus. Colo. Ophth. Soc., March 18.

Sziewzew. Congenital Anomalies of Iris. Klin. Monatsbl. f. Augenh., April, p. 523

Thompson, J. H. Subacute or Chronic Irido-cyclitis. Ophth. Rec. xx, p. 223.

Török, E. Tuberculous Iritis Cured by Tuberculin. Arch. of Ophth, xl, p. 301.

Wilmsen. Closure of Pupil by Iridocyclitis. Successful Operation. Arch. f. Augenh. lxviii, p. 438.

Wirths, M. Persistent Pupillary Membrane. Zeitschr. f. Augenh. xxv, p. 363.

Yeld, R. A. Etiology of Iritis. Brit. Med. Jour., May 13, p. 1110.

SYMPATHETIC DISEASE.

Galezowski, J. Heterochromia, Cataract, and Sympathetic Trouble. Recueil d'Opht. xxxiii, p. 76.

Odinzow. Pathologic Anatomy of Sympathetic Ophthalmia. Klin. Monatsbl. f. Augenh., April, p. 525.

GLAUCOMA.

Asmus. Schiötz Tonometer and Modified Lagrange Sclerectomy. Arch. f. Augenh. lxviii, p. 439.

Gilbert. Origin, Nature and Treatment of Glaucoma. Fortschritte der Med. No. 5.

Marquez, M. Treatment of Glaucoma. Arch. de Oftal. Hisp.-Amer. xi, p. 185.

Risley. Hemorrhagic Glaucoma. Wills Hosp. Ophth. Soc., March 7.

Ruata, V. Tonometer of Schiötz and Sphygmomanometer of Riva-Rocci to Determine Relation of Intraocular Tension to Blood Pressure. Arch. di Ottal. xviii, p. 457.

Santos-Fernandez, J. Treatment of Glaucoma. Arch. de Oftal. Hisp.-Amer. xi, p. 224.

Sattler, C. H. Accuracy in Diagnosis of Glaucoma. Zeitschr. f. Augenh. xxv, p. 488.

Staehli, J. Anatomy of Hemorrhagic Glaucoma. (Bibl.) Arch. f. Augenh. lxviii, p. 311.

Wessely, K. Variations in the Intraocular Fluids. Zeitschr. f. Augenh. xxv, p. 315.

Worthington, H. Buphthalmos. Chicago Ophth. Soc., Feb. 16.

Zirm, E. Intraocular Pressure, Glaucoma and Myopia. Graefe's Arch. f. Ophth. lxxix, p. 96.

LENS.

Black, M. Transient Lens Opacity. Colo. Ophth. Soc., March 18.

Brown, E. V. L. Detachment of Choroid Following Cataract Extraction. Chicago Ophthal. Soc., Mar. 20.

Chevalier. Treatment of Senile Cataract Before and After Operation. L'Opht. Prov., Feb.

Elschnig, A. Clinic-anatomic Contribution Regarding After-Cataract. Klin. Monatsbl. f. Augenh., April, p. 444.

Dimmer. Ectopia of Lens. Zeitschr. f. Augenh. xxv, p. 494.
Feilchenfeld, W. Cataract Operations. Mediz. Klin. No. 15.
Gifford, H. Care in Diabetic Cataract. Ophth. Rec. xx, p. 243.
Jackson, E. Dislocated Ring-shaped Opaque Lens. Colorado Ophth. Soc., Feb. 18.
Kilkelly, P. R. and **Smith, H.** Smith Cataract Operation and the So-Called Bombay Cases. Ophth. Rec. xx, p. 169.
Koenigstein, I. Biology of the Lens. Arch. f. Augenh. lxviii, p. 414.
Krueger, A. Complicated After-cataract and Its Treatment. Klin. Monatsbl. f. Augenh., April, p. 501.
Libby, G. F. Persistent Pupillary Membrane. Colorado Ophth. Soc., Feb. 18.
Rochon-Duvigneaud and **Ducamp.** Detachment of Choroid after Cataract Operation. Soc. d'Opht. de Paris, March.
Schoull. Use of Thiosinamin in Treatment of Senile Cataract. Recueil d'Opht. xxxiii, p. 52.
Smith, H. E. Extraction of Immature Cataract. New York State Jour. Med. ii, p. 513.
Spencer, F. R. Congenital Dislocation of Lenses. Colo. Ophth. Soc., March 18.
Posterior Polar Cataract. Colo. Ophth. Soc., March 18.
Stirling, A. W. Lenticular Insertion of Zonule of Zinn. Ophthalmoscope, ix, p. 385.

VITREOUS.

Loeb, C. Vitreous Opacity. Sec. on Ophth. St. Louis Med. Soc., April 5.
Spencer, F. R. Syphilitic Hyalitis. Colo. Ophth. Soc., March 18.
Wessely, K. Crystalline Mass Floating in the Vitreous. Arch. of Ophth. xl, p. 257.

RETINA.

Braunstein, E. P. Further Study of Fusion Frequency for Diagnosis of Ocular Fundus. Graefe's Arch. f. Ophth. lxxix, p. 180.
Chance, B. Detachment of Retina in Arterio-Sclerosis. Wills Hosp. Ophth. Soc., Mar. 7.
Coover, D. H. Embolus of Central Artery. Colo. Ophth. Soc., Feb. 18.
Ferjukowa. Family Amblyopia. Klin. Monatsbl. f. Augenh., April, p. 524.
Fuchs, E. Hole Formation in Fovea Centralis. Graefe's Arch. f. Ophth. lxxix, p. 42.
Inouye, N. and **Oinuma, S.** Study of Dark Adaptation of One Eye with Help of Adaptation of Other. Ibid., p. 145.
Jennings, J. E. Unilateral Retinitis Pigmentosa. Bull. St. Louis Med. Soc., May 11, p. 212.
Jobson, G. B. Detachment of Retina. Cure. Penn. Med. Jour., May, p. 628.
Köllner. Variations in Adaptation. Berl. Ophth. Gesell., March 9. Ophth. Rev. xxx, p. 159.
Langenhan. Purkinje's Images and Form of Entoptic Foveal Reflex. Ibid., p. 158.

Marple, W. B. Thrombosis in Branch of Retinal Vessels. Arch. of Ophth. xl, p. 292.

Moissonnier. Recurring Intraocular Hemorrhage in Adolescence. Arch. d'Opht. xxxi, p. 240.

Morax. Retinal Cyst at Posterior Pole and Detachment of Retina. Soc. d'Opht. de Paris, March.

Natanson. Traumatic Hole of Macula. Klin. Monatsbl. f. Augenh., April, p. 525.

Parker, F. P. Embolism of Central Retinal Artery. Bull. St. Louis Med. Soc., May 11, p. 213.

Spencer, F. R. Retinitis Pigmentosa. Colo. Ophth. Soc., March 18.

Spencer, F. R. Obstruction of Central Artery. Colo. Ophth. Soc., March 18.

Strader, G. H. Hemorrhagic Neuro-retinitis. Colorado Ophth. Soc., Feb. 18.

Ulrich. Macular Disease Apart from Myopia, Diabetes and Nephritis. Zeitschr. f. Augenh. xxv, p. 486.

Verderame, P. Detachment of Retina in Pregnancy With or Without Albuminuria. (Bibl.) Klin. Monatsbl. f. Augenh., April, p. 452.

Wootton, H. W. Coloboma of Macula. Arch. of Ophth. xl, p. 293.

Abstract. **Geis, F.** (Page 10) Ophth. Rev. xxx, p. 148.

TOXIC AMBLYOPIAS.

Birch-Hirschfeld, A. and Inouye, N. Action of Indarsol on Optic Nerve and Retina. Graefe's Arch. f. Ophth. lxxix, p. 81.

Cohen, M. Papilloedema from Ptomaine Poisoning. Arch. of Ophth. xl, p. 297.

Holloway, T. B. Methyl Alcohol Amblyopia. New York Med. Jour., May 27, p. 1030.

OPTIC NERVE.

Axenfeld, T. Varix Formation on Optic Disk. Zeitschr. f. Augenh. xxv, p. 362.

Coover, D. H. Optic Atrophy. Colorado Ophth. Soc., Feb. 18.

Cutler, C. W. Optic Neuritis from Sinusitis. Arch. of Ophth. xl, p. 298.

Dutoit. Etiology of Retro-bulbar Neuritis. Arch. f. Augenh. lxviii, p. 331.

Gonzalez, J. J. Treatment of Optic Neuritis. Anales de Oftal. xiii, p. 397.

Hillion, H. Extensive Physiologic Excavation of Optic Nerve. Arch. d'Opht. xxxi, p. 247.

Murray, W. Choked Disk Produced by Cerebral Cyst. Ophth. Rec. xx, p. 245.

Natanson. Atypical Arrangement of Opaque Nerve Fibres. Klin. Monatsbl. f. Augenh., April, p. 523.

Parker, F. J. Optic Atrophy from Traumatic Asphyxia. Arch. of Ophth. xl, p. 295.

Posey, W. C. Double Papilloedema from Supposed Sphenoidal Disease. Tr. Wills Hosp. Ophth. Soc., Feb. 6.
Traumatic Optic Neuritis. Ibid., April 3.

Risley, S D. Atrophy of Right Optic Nerve Following Trauma. Trans. Wills Hosp. Ophth. Soc., April 3.

Scalinci, N. Relations Between Chronic Retrobulbar Neuritis and Arterio-Sclerosis. Arch. d'Opht. xxxi, p. 225.

Schreiber, L. Significance of Marchi Reaction in Studies of Optic Nerve. Zeit. f. d. ges. Neurol. and Psychol. iv, p. 3.

Sherer, J. W. Optic Atrophy. Ophth. Rec. xx, p. 223.

Spencer, F. R. Optic Atrophy. Colo. Ophth. Soc. Mar.

Thomas, J. B. Choked Disk and Progressive Blindness Due to Sarcoma of Brain. Jour. Amer. Med. Assn., May 13, p. 1380.

TRACTS AND CENTERS.

Burnier, R. Tumor of Hypophysis and Infantilism. Ann. d'Oculist. cxlv, p. 277.

Faith, T. Unusual Fields of Vision. Chicago Ophth. Soc., Feb. 16.

Kirsch. Tower Skull. Zeitschr. f. Augenh. xxv, p. 488.

Lafon, C. Two Cases of Tumor of Hypophysis. Recueil d'Opht. xxxiii, p. 65.

Margulies, A. Punctured Wound of Optic Tract. Prag. Med. Woch. No. 8.

Posey, W. C. Bitemporal Hemianopsia. Wills. Hosp. Ophth. Soc., Feb. 6.

EYEBALL.

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